

姊妹都市

Trask House  
Books, Inc.,  
2146 N.E. 8th,  
Portland, Oregon  
97212

\$1.95





姉

妹

都

市

SISTER CITY  
& Other Tales  
by Norway H. Leif  
Trask House  
1971

*Note:*

Copyright © 1971, by Norway Hjalmar Leif  
All characters and incidents in this book are fictional  
and any resemblance to persons living or dead,  
or to events, is purely coincidental.  
NHL, 1971

*Acknowledgements:*

“Sister City” and “Ship-Shape” appeared in  
*Human Voice Quarterly*, an Olivant Publication;  
“Savages” was published in *Cairn* and  
“Baked Alaska” in *Dragonfly*.

Japanese characters by Keiko Kodachi.

Book Design by Lolita Celsi.

This volume is published with the aid of a grant  
from the National Endowment for the Arts.

THE TALES,  
IN ORDER OF  
APPEARANCE:

<i>Savages</i> . . . .	1
<i>Sister City</i> . . .	5
<i>Ship-Shape</i> . .	11
<i>Baked Alaska</i> .	15

To: Henry Adams II



## S A V A G E S

“Couldn’t reach flesh in his switch--and zero time to the sick tracks--A long time between suns . . .”--William S. Burroughs

Above Karachi, some two hours by bus, is a village I had wished to see for a number of years. Its history is fascinating. Armies of a dozen or more empires bent on conquest have passed through it. And at one time or another it has seen modifications in architecture and popular attitude--but they still reflect several basic, pagan cults.

One hot day last August--of all times--the opportunity seemed just right to visit the place, for the junket was suggested by two Pakistani friends: Talal, a medical student, and Habib, whom I had known in the US and who was on holiday at home after finishing a graduate degree there.

We made the trip and toured the ruins at length; then we walked the scant half-mile to the village. There I was surprised at myself, for somehow the place hit me like a body shock. The multiplied filth made the parts of Karachi where I spent my time seem a paradise. The noise and brute friendliness of the people, mostly dressed in dirty rags, added to it all. Such a quick change I’d never seen in a short distance such as that from the city to this town--throw in Chicago, Washington DC, London slums as one jolts in from the silk-stocking areas.

Habib said, “They’re savages here. Don’t let the ruins of old cultures make you a foolish romantic; they know nothing of them. Here, though, as you might sense, killing and banditry is still a way of life.” I asked why. “Because tribalism at its elemental is still the way of life,” he said, and added, “An eye for an eye is still the operational rule, too.”

“You know,” Habib continued, “I was born not too far from here. And I’m not trying to lay it on thick when I tell you that hired assassination and professional banditry are as popular and frequent now as in the 18th or 19th centuries.”

I must have looked pretty grim, for he said "My countrymen," and smiled particularly broadly. "These people make good friends. I like them. But it pays for one to know his footing well," he added, again smiling.

The three of us drifted into talk about whether Democracy could ever really work on a broad, international basis, overcome tribalism, that sort of thing, though Talal remained the more silent. Unlike Habib, he had not been abroad, though both his English and his French were flawless. He seemed to me to be more the agonized idealist than my gregarious friend. I had heard him, Talal, profess "complete faith" in man's essential goodness, and in Democracy. Certainly by his professional dedication to medicine he indicated a faith in service to people and in his nation's future. At the same time, though, as Habib whispered to me more than once, travel by public bus made Talal uneasy in several ways. He was--though polite--put out that Habib and I wished to travel that way to see more of the people. "Three in a taxi is not too expensive," Talal would insist, periodically.

We turned up a filthy side street after being courted by flies and bugs at an open cafe, looking for a bus that might be nearly full, hence near to leaving for Karachi.

About twelve feet away from where we were standing a six-foot montaniard of, I guessed, about forty abruptly faced our street from the sidewalk. We were in the middle of the street or nearly so. He took two paces toward us, his eyes set in our direction; he went rigid and crashed to the cobblestones. He was fixed--that is, he was rigid; crucifixial. The fists were clenched, the eyes wide open. Arms and legs were like iron bars. The dirty robe was ripped. He was like lumber--or metal--in the street. Nobody moved; many looked. My friends insisted that we move directly on. Talal wouldn't look at all, Habib glanced at the man quickly, twice.

Talal was silent. Habib said "epilepsy."

“What will happen to him?” I asked.

“He’ll wake up or he’ll swallow his tongue and die, I guess,” Habib said.

“There is no cure,” Talal added.

“He’s from some mountain village. Some friends will find him if he wasn’t the only one from his tribe to come into town,” Habib said.

Indiscreet or not I could not quit watching. We walked slowly away. We were close to what passed as a square where busses were loading. We found one headed our way close by, and through its window I could see the big man’s body. Two men in bedouin costumes kicked and nudged him half onto the sidewalk—which made the crucifixial rigidity that much more striking. Again I thought, “like a lumber cross.”

From our bus, at a right angle I could continue watching. I could also see, at a tangent, the village police station. “Will the police help?” I asked Habib, whose father was a policeman in Karachi.

“There is no law in this village,” he said, “and you needn’t bother to ask if there is a public health service or a Pakistani Medicare program,” he added, grinning again.

Talal remained glum and silent. In about ten more minutes I looked over and saw the epileptic sitting up in the dust of the cobbled street. He had come around, though he was obviously still addled. No friends had appeared.

As we drove off almost immediately I thought routine thoughts about the story of the Samaritan, and places where I’d read that both Jesus and Mohammed were believed likely to have been epileptics.

The bus was no winner. It was old and rough. I began to come around to Talal’s attitude on busses.

An old Christian farmer started shouting--moved to scream--

ing—that the little Moslem boy who was taking fares had done him out of a couple of pennies because of prejudice.

When the hysterics finally went too far the driver stopped the vehicle and walked back to the rear.

“If you don’t like this bus, get off,” he said.

## SISTER CITY

“Gentle among the gentle, free among the free . . .”--Alan Ansen

The Famous Violinist from Portland (“City of Roses”), Oregon, knew that Sapporo, the primary city of Hokkaido had, for some years since the restoration of amicable Japanese-American relations, been sharing the role of “Sister City” with the large Oregon town.

Beyond this the Famous Violinist was not certain of much beyond what his Webster’s New World Dictionary told him about population (nearly 320 thousand) and the famous white and hairy Ainu, “A member of a primitive, light-skinned race of Japan, now living mostly in Karafuto and Hokkaido . . .”. He had seen some National Geographic coverage once. This was vague in his memory but it didn’t really trouble him. After all, his World War II time had been spent in England.

“Why not,” said the Famous Violinist, “visit the Sister City?”

The six concerts in Tokyo were finished--and with them the tour of Asia. The charter flight, generously enough, left them ten days.

The more he thought of it the more the idea pleased him. The Famous Violinist, at 46, was a dedicated artist, but also a dedicated bachelor and a dedicated homosexual. But more important was the fact that he fancied himself as having one of the century’s finest and, at the same time, most humane senses of humor. He prided himself on knowing two of Toyko’s sister-boy geisha bars very well indeed, into the bargain, and even knew that the innovative Japanese picked up that term only after Anderson’s *Tea and Sympathy* played Tokyo.

He really had to admit to something like a superior feeling on that score. He mused, silently, smiling, over the recollection of how the cello man had rather gone overboard for the draggy geishas. And even the standard geishas seemed not much more than cute to the Famous Violinist. At 46, though, he admitted that he might have become somewhat narrow in viewpoint. But if one didn't know what one liked by then—such as ample meat on the bones—one could hardly expect to, ever.

After the decision was final it took about an hour to pack his bag for a three-day visit, and about another hour to get to Haneda and on the plane. Flight time on the small jet was a mere 45 minutes. It was just past eleven when he reached Sapporo. He was weary and went directly to bed.

Next morning he skipped breakfast, staying in his room at the American-style hotel until 12. Then he had coffee and toured the city. He bought a wooden, carved bear each for his niece and nephew in Medford. The kids, he reflected, were slightly Neanderthal-like the advertised carvers, the Ainu.

At the hotel again, he stashed the souvenirs, and learnt of Ainu malnutrition and “contemporary abuse by their Japanese overlords,” from a Kansas State Ph.D. and her husband at the hotel bar. The tone of edification urged the Famous Violinist onto the streets, sooner than planned, to research the gay life of Sapporo.

It was more humid, warmer than he expected this far North. He walked through a park straightaway—partly for quiet and shade, partly for a trial cruise. He eyed two workmen just inside the gate, and estimated them to be under 40. The pair of workmen eyed him back. One turned to wink as he passed. He stopped and let them walk past him and then he followed the workmen, a few paces back, assured by a now-metro-nomic over-the-shoulder glance by the younger, more hand-

some one.

It was probably shorter, but it seemed like a 15-minute walk through the tailored greenery. The workmen finally veered right, round a sharp turn in the path and disappeared into some higher bushes and small trees. The Famous Violinist found himself just behind them on the threshold of a park toilet. They had stopped still. As one they smiled broadly at him. He smiled numbly because of the sudden confrontation. The younger one said in English "Welcome to Japan," and motioned him to enter. The Famous Violinist felt tight in his gut and smiled again, sickly this time, turned a near-about face and headed out of the park. He was angry with himself. There was nobody else to be angry with. He walked all the way back to his hotel. There, too, his fortune seemed consistent.

He had just started on a Scotch when the Kansas Professor and her husband entered the diningroom. They ate together. There was no way out. She advanced opinions on carved bears (they had one, too) and the future of the Ainy. The husband, a "fisheries authority before going into Kansas," discoursed on America's need to "wise up and stop the damned sneaky Jap commercial grabs in Southeast Asia." Then he talked woodenly about touring's problems for a while. The Famous Violinist hurried his meal while agreeing on all topics.

It was just dark now. But he fairly trotted to the taxi stand across the square. No cabs in, but there was no trouble getting one on the street. He jumped in. He was no latrine queen, but after that Kansas couple anyone, anyplace. He promised himself to forget all of his usual cautions. "Gay bar?" he asked the driver. "Gei bah?" the driver asked back. "Japanese boy-bar?" he advanced. "Ber-ber?" asked the driver. "Shayvoo? Hay-kuts?" The nerves of the Famous Violinist were not what he wished they might be. He wondered

why he had come to Sapporo in the first place. "Homosexual bar," he started again. "Oh! O-mo-sex-el bah!" the driver beamed. "Me dunno," he beamed even wider. "They use-to two heah Sapporo, but close. Dunno wheah nomore. Askee-pleasee-man!" And without pause he ground into gear and roared, in low all the way, half a block to where a policeman stood, staring about at the evening's increasing tempo. The Famous Violinist gave his heart to Jesus and sank silently into the back seat.

The policeman, however, seemed intrigued with the problem and not at all hostile. The driver--waving and pointing--indicated his outdated information to the man of law. The policeman, by his grunts, nods and pointing supplemented the gestures of the driver, indicating his own complete confusion. He seemed sympathetic to both the driver and his passenger. He opened the front door of the taxi and got in with the driver. After further conversation the driver turned to the American. "He say we ask gang-stah==gang-stah should know," he said with another huge smile. They drove five minutes into a darker part of town, stopping in front of a grubby pachinko parlor in a gaudy block which reverberated with the clatter of the steel pachinko balls.

The policeman got out, talked animatedly to a blocky man in a half-open Philippine-style shirt for some five minutes. This time the driver stayed in the cab. And the Famous Violinist came slowly out of what might pass for shock and began to stare avidly at the faces near him--especially those of the gangster, the policeman; and his guardian the driver. He wished he had a pocket mirror so that he could examine his own face, too. It was all mad.

Now it seemed that the gangster was bewildered, too, agreeing with the cop and the driver on the fact that there had once been two bars and that both were closed or had moved. Eventually he waved good-bye and the three again drove off.



They went to the Central Police Station.

The officer-in-charge faced the three. Two interrogated him in Japanese. He then turned to the American: "Gei-bah?" he frowned. "Lots gei-boy on stleet, lots in pocks if you wanna gei-boy." Confident, finally, the Famous Violinist smiled and said "Want bah." "We try," said the officer-in-charge. The taxi driver, who had followed this exchange of English with scholarly interest, grinned.

The officer-in-charge produced two large, bent cardboard tubes, and from them he drew two large and greasy, battered police maps of the city. They pored over the old charts for some time, until the officer-in-charge fairly shouted out "Heah!!" The others looked at where the stubby finger pointed with universal admiration. "Heah one. I no know wheh uddah mebbe too, though," he said. He didn't need to, however, for one find cheered the whole expedition immeasurably. Then the officer in charge said "Haba good time. Weowcome to Jappan." Bows, handshakes.

Back at the taxi the American found to his further amazement that the triumverate continued. The driver set his meter back to the minimum as a matter of pride. The initial policeman accompanied them as a matter of hospitality and civic responsibility--wanting to see the mission to its complete and successful conclusion. They pulled into the street once more.

About 20 minutes later the cab stopped in front of a sign reading, in English, "HI-LIFE SNACK." "We heah," the policeman said. He got out and opened the door for the American. "Downstaih," he said, smiled, and got back into the cab. The cab driver, after being paid, proffered a card to the Famous Violinist. "This far away center city--you call taxi me you wan go hotel lay-ta," he said. "Good ruck." They roared away.

He watched them go into the night. He felt very alone. It

was, he reflected, like waking after reaching a mid-point in a dream collage featuring Kafka's "K" and Alice in Wonderland.

He walked downstairs into the snack club. It was dimly lit and seemed posh. The hour was yet surprisingly early. There were about four tables occupied and about half the twenty bar seats were taken. It was, after all, a Monday, he remembered. He had, regardless, earned a whiskey. The Master himself waited on him. "Mizu-wari, dozo," he said—but the Master spoke good English and asked "You wanna double?"

Soon enough the Master asked him about his home. "I come from Portland, Oregon, Master," he said, adding "of course you know we are Sapporo's Sister City." "Yas, of cawse, of cawse; berry fine city you. We berry prow be Sister-City Potelan."

But before the Master could continue his questioning, the American felt a hand slip into his free hand, from behind. He turned on his stool, surprised. The young workman from the park, smiling, stood there. "Welcome to Japan," he said.

## SHIP-SHAPE

“This is the place, Craven, the end of our way; Hobble the horses, we have had a long day.”--W. H. Auden

Terrible was a man whose age seemed set, but at the same time hard to guess. His name had been earned in editorial jobs on bush-league newspapers in the Midwest, for the most part, over some 20 years or more. I met him when he came to edit the paper I was working on in Birch, Wyoming. I was city editor at 21; there was Jackson, a middle-aged reporter, and a part-time society editor. Terrible was our leader. The editor-in-chief.

His perpetual glum-to-grim attitude got me down before very long, and I actually worked at getting a grin out of him--plotted, in fact, since the office was difficult enough and God knows the town was no Eden. I succeeded after I had despaired. Simply to bug him, and assuming that my days on the paper were numbered anyway, I wrote an abomination of double-deck headline for the *Argus*' front page: "Ship-shape Sailor/Shoots Sloppy Spouse."

Terrible grinned over it and grinned all the way through the wire copy it headed which, as I recall, described a sailor who returned home from months at sea and discovered his house a total mess (wife included), and who, after an allnight drinking bout, shot her dead. He let it go, front page and all.

Having been reached by my rising to the apex of bad taste, he asked me to join him for eleven o'clock breakfast the next day, Sunday, if I had nothing better to do. He suggested the hash-house I favored anyway. I was delighted.

It was a sunny day and the food was good and we had coffee and more coffee after the ham and eggs--and, for the first time to me, Terrible talked. It was the only time he ever opened up. No repeats later. The openers were usual.

"You a bachelor, Taylor?" he asked, knowing very well I was. "Yes," I said. "Confirmed."

"Not bad," said Terrible.

"Oh, I don't know."

"I do. Paid my last alimony check last month. I'm 57. It's been 26 years she's been into me and even my personal property. That problem's still current enough."

"That bad!"

"That's right, Kid. In fact I'm chicken to own a car, she's had me on the cross so many times, so long. All the positions." The unusual grin between the pipestem and group moustache. "I think your college boys call it grotesque," Terrible said. He puffed the pipe. "I got a kid older than you and a daughter your age. She never sees me. The Kid's coming through here on his way to St. Paul to show me the two boys next week. One eight and one ten. I saw them four or so years back."

We had more coffee and I finished the toast. Terrible re-packed the pipe. "I've been in this racket too long to remember," he said. "I interviewed Teddy Roosevelt as a cub reporter; another of my breaks was being at the scene when Amy MacPreacher came in out of the boonies after the shack-up. And--in due time, as they say, I was pulling down a salary a damned site better than average. I'd been married about four years when Heart's Delight decided we should live better to "be just to our new position." We moved to the suburbs then--into a house four times as big as we needed. She even decided to hire a Jap house-boy, which was a very big thing those days." He re-fired the pipe.

"Hired him while I was out of town on a story. Told me she'd pay for the salary and extras because she was writing a novel. She left no doubt it was to be that one literary history has wanted all these years: G.A.M.: The Great American Novel.

“By the end of three months I could feel the rocks under the boat and I told Precious we’d have to let the Jap go and cut back, maybe move house, or we’d be bankrupt.”

“I suppose she wouldn’t hear of it,” I said.

“Both brilliant and true. Said she’d leave me if I pushed it. I finally had to push it. So she moved to a smaller flat with the Jap and the kids and in due time filed and got legal possession of the kids, support, alimony, red blood. The car went with it. That was my next-to-last car. She got the last one too—which I’m still trying to figure. She had good lawyers; still does, in fact.”

“Did she finish the novel?” I asked Terrible. He massaged his moustache for a good many seconds.

“Yes,” he said, his mouth pointing down like his moustache in the smile. “Some friend saw notice of the publication in the Sunday *New York Times*--where they list all of the books received. It was never reviewed anywhere I know of. That was Heart’s Delight’s Great American Novel--and as far as I know her only one. It was a vanity press did it, of course. But she deserved a prize, for godsake. A big prize.”

I took the offer. “Prize?”

“Prize is right, Sunny Jim,” Terrible said. “Prize is right. A prize for the title of the opus: *How to Love*.” His teeth ground into the pipe stem. I swallowed some cold coffee.

“Taylor,” he said, “when you really, really know you’re in love; when you really are hard up, when you really need some, take whoever it is out in some good cemetery and when you’ve fucked to your heart’s satisfaction, wipe your gonicker off in the weeds and get the hell out of there.”

That began another silence that was extended by the church crowd’s starting to come in. We cleared out after the ceremony of another half-cup.

I stayed with the argus another few months. Then a more stable job appeared and I took it. Any attraction smalltown papers had for me was gone by then anyway.

Some time late in December, Terrible became ill and was hospitalized. It only came to my attention after New Years when I ran into the reporter, Jackson, on the street.

“Nothing serious,” Jackson said. “Just fatigue and too much booze.” But the next week the *Argus* carried a two-inch black box on page one with a brief obituary on Terrible in it.

I called Jackson immediately, to indulge my own shock. He seemed equally disturbed, and we agreed to meet at a bar at 5:30.

After work, over the drink Jackson told me that he had talked to the head nurse at the hospital when he picked up the statistics and Terrible’s effects, and that the nurse had said it was a very unusual case, though by no means unique.

“She said he could have lived if he’d wanted to,” Jackson said.

I assume the thumbs were tucked in when Terrible’s hand set for the last time.

I hope so.

In these small towns you always get “Abide with Me,” and either “The Old Rugged Cross,” or “I Come to the Garden, Alone,” at funerals: I wasn’t up to that, so I didn’t go. Terrible once cracked to me that he wouldn’t die until the funeral home agreed to do “Amazing Grace” as a request number—with his own lyrics to be sung.

A thorough, solo, drunk is the only way to honor certain of the dead.

## BAKED ALASKA

“Willow catkins fly, my friend has not yet returned.  
The plum blossoms and the warbler were lonely, my empty  
dreams remain.  
I have spent ten thousand coppers for the wine of the capital.  
I stand by the balustrade in the spring rain, looking at peo-  
nies.” (Nagao Uzan)

The two wandered around Tokyo’s new skyscraper and, though hungry, went up to the 34th floor to see the city at twilight—but it was smoggy and anyway a little too early for the neon to be on and effective. And it was too expensive to go to the bar and wait.

They moved down a hall to a position in a large, uncarpeted foyer and could have climbed the steps to the last floor—but there was a small admission charge and Akira said that many country people went there, which meant Akira didn’t wish to. Starved and tired, Morris didn’t really care either.

So they went down on the elevator as far as they could, to the third floor, and took escalators down to the ground level, through elegantly large lobbies with new shops and ads in the most tasteful commercial art. After reaching the first floor it took almost five minutes to conquer the maze of eating places and find the German-Swiss restaurant which had the “We Are American Style” sign in the window.

The kibob-type dish looked good to both of them and Akira ordered for them, adding two draft beers for the wait.

The meal was excellent. The Japanese red wine was a perfect table wine for the food. In particularly good spirits, Morris thought Baked Alaska would be new to Akira, and special fun. But before he could order it the Japanese said “Boysan!” to the waiter, then something else and, smiling at Morris, “Chicken platter OK?”

Confused, somewhat angry and somewhat hurt, Morris grinned and made a joke that didn't help. Shortly the waiter returned with two complete dinners of baked chicken.

They choked the second meal down and Morris' confused anger caused him to order the Baked Alaska anyway, to prove something-or-other, though both were stuffed to bursting. He was silent the while, and Akira was polite and apparently didn't notice the upset of his American friend. Akira had been far more considerate than most people, up until tonight anyway. God only knew why tonight had gone well so very briefly, Morris reflected. But it was still early and the rain had held off.

They walked around Azabu and Akasaka.

"Shall we go to a bar?" Akira asked.

"How about a movie?"

"No. I too tired. Go to a bar in Shinjuku or go home."

"Take your choice. If we go 'home' you'll watch TV and I'll sulk and drink whiskey. If we go to a bar we'll drink and get jealous and argue."

At the next intersection Akira said, "Wait here. That big building is my office. I will go to the wash room." He disappeared.

Morris felt another cornerstone tremble a bit. "Or," he said to himself, "at least a kidney stone." He felt his own full bladder tenderly.

In five minutes Akira appeared again, smiling, immaculate, and apparently both confident and joyous. Morris, hands in pockets, glumly scuffed several paces behind the Japanese as they proceeded down the sidewalk for several blocks. Walking at just-under normal speed, he reckoned he's still be too far away for conversation, for Akira was walking at a more-than-normal pace. They passed an American-style hotel.



“This is my office building and I’m going in, to the wash room,” Morris said. Akira followed Morris into the hotel and then out again.

“OK! Shall we?” Akira beamed. Fingers snapping, he hailed a cab without further question.

He gave the driver an address in Jingumae. His own.

At the apartment, a pleasant six-mat room with kitchenette, they relaxed for a few moments—heard a couple of songs on the radio, ties and coats off. Akira put on a yukata, turned the radio off and the TV on. Morris grumbled and poured a drink; said his first intention had been a good night’s sleep anyway. Akira turned the TV off immediately, turned the radio back on, curled up and went promptly to sleep on the couch.

Morris drank. But the food had been so rich and plentiful that the whiskey didn’t even buzz. Two cockroaches ventured out in the dim light long enough to see that the room was occupied—and scurried away, one going to within an inch of Akira’s head as it ran up the wall and into a crack. Morris took the next drink straight.

After 45 minutes, Morris put on his coat and awoke Akira to say good night. Akira was sleep-soggy, apologetic, eager to go out to a bar. Morris finally yielded, half to avoid a scene, half out of the desire to go to Shinjuku. Shinjuku was always exciting, regardless of the time of year, the weather, or one’s mood; exciting just to see; pretty electric just to walk on the street: Japanese and foreigners agreed on that.

Yuki was working at the first bar they visited—along with three others and the master. Yuki was a good friend of Morris, and Akira’s best friend. They visited and drank til midnight. Yuki said he would be off at one and would then go to the Winter, a new bar open until 2:30, should they wish to join him. Akira was eager, and Morris agreed, so they left the Box after telling Yuki they’d see him at the Winter.

Morris moved into the Winter as Akira held the door for him. The rain had started while they were still drinking at the Box. The Winter was small, well-appointed in the modern American mode. Sanitary. Sterile--in the manner that a bank with window walls is. And though it was new the clientele were obvious transfers from elsewhere; a rather cohesive social group of old friends and acquaintances with many tales to share. And Akira was the foremost attraction and bathed in it with gossipy, innocent intensity. He talked and Morris squirmed at their table, alone, and the only American in the place.

At 1:30 Yuki had still not come and Morris' weariness of early evening was back. So was his frustration and anger--the two dinners, the rest-room impoliteness, the unexpected trip to Akira's, and being ignored at the Winter--a generally fucked-up evening from his every way of looking at it. Ignorance and hurt pride nicked each other, turning into tension, in the whiskey fishbowl of the moment.

Akira passed by their table. Morris touched a sleeve. "I'm very, very tired," he said. "I'm going to have to get some rest." He half stood, "Shall we?" he asked, using Akira's favorite imperative as a verity. But it proved no verity.

"Go ahead," said Akira. "I will stay here. You telephone me tomorrow."

There was no scene. Morris controlled his desire to shout and in exaggeratedly tempered tone said "I hate this God-damned club and you know it and you knew I didn't want to come here hours ago. I am tired and you knew that hours ago. I have waited around with you for God knows how long and for God knows what since dinner."

Lack of scene or not, monotone or not, the bar's stock occupants turned to stare at their table. A range of interest showed.

“I am leaving,” said Morris, “but I am not being told to buzz off. So if I go out that front door and it closes on me, alone, it closes between us for good. No phone call, no nothing. Because I will not go through this again.”

Akira looked surprised, but there was no other indication of emotion. He called for and paid the bill. “We will go,” Akira said.

With unusual speed they found a taxi and drove back through the drizzle to Jingumae.

Both undressed and put on yukatas. Morris poured two whiskies and water. Then he went to the toilet. When he got back, Akira had finished his first drink and was drinking straight whiskey. Finally the Japanese was openly upset. So was the American. He tried to stop a storm: “I love you and I need you. That’s the one thing we mustn’t get lost in foolishness,” he said, and kissed Akira.

Akira jerked away. “You don’t need nobody. You has everything. You don’t need nobody!” Akira said, bursting into tears. He turned his back on Morris and wept bitterly for what seemed a very long time. Finally Akira turned half around--still ignoring Morris’ quiet, repeated profession of love, and said “I used to love one person. ‘You are my person I say to him.’ But I don’t love no one no more. I don’t love my Mama or my Daddy, or my Brother or Sisters. But I used to love one person. Now I don’t love no one never no more.” And Akira rocked back and forth sobbing again.

Both were weeping now, but still at emotional cross-purposes.

Akira drank two half-glasses of whiskey, straight, and threw each glass under the low, Japanese table after draining them; but they didn’t break--just ticked each other. Then, crying out “I want whiskey. Whiskey! I want Shinjuku bar,” Akira grabbed the neck of the empty Nikka quart and smashed it into the two tumblers. Glass flew this time.

“Nothing matter anymore,” Akira said.

“Everything matters,” Morris said, “especially our being together.”

“Nothing matter!” Akira shouted this time. He reached a fistful of Morris’ old letters from the bookcase and crumpled them on the tatami. “I never go to United States,” he said. Morris tried to calm Akira, but it was futile.

From another bookshelf Akira grabbed fistfuls of the beautiful scrolls that were his texts from the flower-arranging school. “I never study this no more. I don’t love no one no more. You don’t need no one. I go back to work for firm. Stay in Japan.” Akira struck two matches at once and put the flames to the silk scrolls. They wouldn’t ignite.

Morris, in panic, struggled with Akira, shoved him sideways to the tatami mat. Akira kept repeating the litany of nevers, cursing Morris’ American firm and his own flower study. He made it up, struck more matches and went after the scrolls and letters again. Morris’ physical counterattack was less successful, as Akira’s single-minded dedication increased.

“For Christ’s sake,” he shouted, “if we want to burn up that’s one thing, but there are 40 other people in this apartment.” But all that came from Akira this time was “Whiskey! Whiskey!”

The wild scene continued almost five minutes before Akira gave over the remaining matches. He did so only after being dragged up and shoved toward the door with assurances of Shinjuku and whiskey.

As they reeled out the door, Akira shut it, locking the key, Morris’ shoes, tie, and both their umbrellas inside. And they staggered downstairs. Akira swiped a pair of sandals for Morris from the shoe rack.

It was raining again, but it was so late that they found a cab quickly, after reaching the end of the alley where Akira lived.

Akira passed out as soon as they were in the back seat. Morris had the cab take them to a riokan near Shibuya Station, which was just five minutes away.

They tumbled out of the cab and walked to the riokan. The mistress gave them a fancy pair of rooms on the third floor—sitting and bedroom. They sagged down in the sitting room. The stair climb had topped the endurance limit of them both. The Mistress brought tea and cookies. The sight of them ended the night for Akira, who rushed from the suite, hard on her heels, and threw himself at the benjo, vomiting violently and long and loudly.

It was 4 a.m. They went directly to bed, after Morris left a wake-up call. Annmarie, a writer and friend had told him to call before nine on urgent business. They waited only seconds after that to begin self-recriminations. Each was wrapped in his own misery; his own world. And Morris alternated the masks of the betrayer and the betrayed as he apologised for the evening. Akira again wept, saying over and over, “I have been bad, bad Japanese boy all year,” over and over, defining no further. Then, fatigued, the clutching embraces and unconvincing love.

Akira slept. Morris still couldn’t. He got up and sat in a chair after a half-hour of tossing. He sat until the wake-up call, which didn’t wake Akira. He called Annmarie. She said that the business wasn’t really important—that she was going to the shore for a week and would get in touch when she returned.

He returned to his chair, watching the boy sleep, through the gauze curtains. Akira slept soundly. Morris drew the outer curtains between the rooms; made green tea from the thermos set the Mistress had left. He drank three cups.

It was finally 10 a.m. He looked down at Shibuya Station. The industry, the hardness, the dirt, the dark metals, rust, dark wood, cement.

He noted that he was three floors up; mused that a person jumping would likely do the job, what with the hardness making up for the short fall. Impact. But the question was academic. It was time to bathe. Not much time left before checkout time.

He rolled the window shut and turned back, into the room, facing the place where Akira slept. The odor of sweet vomit was acrid enough for morning openers. He would draw the bath and then wake Akira. They would have to hurry a bit; even so it might be past time.



